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## Oral History Interview: Jean Thomas

Jean Thomas

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Date May 14, 1976

Jean Thomas

By.: S. T. Crawford, Jr., Attorney-in-Fact  
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Date May 14, 1976

Jean Thomas, the "Traipsin' Woman"

Interviewed by

Dorothy Jean Schroeder

and

Dorothy Hatfield McGinnis

April, 1972

D. J. Schroeder: Some friends of the Cabell-Wayne Historical Society have gathered in the home of Miss Jean Thomas, the "traipsin' woman" in her "wee house in the wood." And the ladies who are here visiting today are Mrs. Robert Mulholland who is doing some sketching as this reporting is taking place. She is sketching the McGuffy school and some of the trees in the back-ground that have been here, and Miss Thomas hopes will remain and be taken care of for many, many decades to come. Also with us taking photographs is Mrs. Jim St. Clair, that's Micky, and we'll have something to put in the Cabell-Wayne Historical Society to show what we were doing and how we looked when this was taking place. Mrs. Kermit McGinnis is here, and she will probably be making some remarks on our tape recording before the afternoon is through. But the star is Miss Jean Thomas, and she has been a star for a long time.

D. J. Schroeder: You've been a star with me. I'm Dorothy Jean Schroeder, D. J., and you've been a star with me I expect that was 15, 18 years ago the first time I came down to the "wee house in the wood." But, Jean Thomas, tell me, how you got started, what your museum is. Let's pretend someone who's never heard of you, or folk music, Elizabethan music has now turned this recording on and wants to hear from the very beginning. What kind of music is this? Who are you?

Jean Thomas: And how I got started?

D. J. Schroeder: Right.

Jean Thomas: Well, I'll have to, of course, give my mother credit who was Kate Smith of Lancaster, Hocking County, Ohio. And, she'd always loved history and loved music. She was, her mother was a rising of French, and they so they do love music and theater, and I inherited that, of course, from her. And, my father, though he couldn't sing a tune nor whistle a tune, my father had a most impressive voice. When he intoned a "boo-bin-atamobo" one night and made his



thribe increase, it was heavenly to me. That was acting, and I loved that. And then when he'd say things from Arabian Nights, though I was scared to death and just shiver, I'd say, "Father, I'm afraid, but say some more. It sounds so wonderful."

D. J. Schroeder: How many children were there in your family?

Jean Thomas: My mother had four girls and two boys.

D. J. Schroeder: And you were in the middle?

Jean Thomas: Let me see. I always called myself the youngest daughter, but I wasn't the youngest member of the family. It was my brother who just didn't like at all bein' that I usurped his title of being the youngest. I was the youngest daughter my mother-- my brother, the inventor, Dr. George Ingersoll Bell, but he didn't like the Ingersoll. That was wicked; he was an infidel or somethin' they called him, I didn't know what. But he changed his name to George G. Bell. That's his portrait in there on the piano.

D. J. Schroeder: Now, in this year, 1972, April, how old are you?

Jean Thomas: Well, you'll have to do the calculatin' yourself. I was born on the 14th of November, 1881.

D. J. Schroeder: You can probably tell us about cold waves we know nothing about can't you? (Laughing)

Jean Thomas: Tell you about the old . . . we'd have an old curling iron, you mean for the hair?

D. J. Schroeder: Yes! Tell us about that kind of cold wave. (Laughter)

Jean Thomas: The cold wave. Other things have come since I'm getting so old. Why, to curl the hair, we'd have these old-fashioned curling irons and if you had wood stove, you'd stuff it in there among the ashes and heat it and then singes, and smell it, you know, and curl your hair. But if you didn't have that, why, you'd put it into the lamp and . . . put it down into the lamp . . . the oil lamp and heat your

curling iron and make your curls, and but I never could bother much with that; I just couldn't. I'd just comb it up straight as I could 'n put a band around my head.

D. J. Schroeder: That's what the girls are doing in 1972. /It's much the same thing./ Now, we're in Ashland, Kentucky, and we are sitting in a room in your home. I wish you would look around this room and describe it.

Jean Thomas: It would take a long time, Dorothy Jean.

D. J. Schroeder: All right.

Jean Thomas: From the beginning on as I told you that as I have told you that I'm proud to be kin to be kin to the Hatfields and McCoys. I trace my kinship to Devil Anse a way back to England where I played, and that's his picture there, picture there. My publisher says, "Can you go to the home?" I'd written a book called Big Sandy. I'm not selling the book. It's out of print. But, I'll show it to you. It's out of print now, but we're gonna put it back in. He says, "Can you go to the homes of these people?" I said, "I surely can. How much?" Playfully, you know, putting out my hand. I don't know a thin' in the world about business, you know, or what to do about anything, money or so. So he said, "Well, that would be a good story--'Life Visits the Hatfields and the McCoys'." So, here you are in Life, girls. That's "Little Bud." We called him "Little Bud," honey; he's seven foot tall and just buried him recently. I went to his funeral. And that's aunts up there and a relative of theirs. Says, call, let me tell you what that old lady said. We was up there interviewin' her for this story, "Life Visits the Hatfields and McCoys," and I was taken with her appearance. She just said, she said, "Calls hisself a Hatfield!" Says, "Lord, honey, he's a Woods-coat; he's base born." And says, "They's just a fightin' and a fightin' up there and no one would go nigh, and LaVicey was birthin' another babe. So, I, they fit so bad, but I went anyway.

D. J. Schroeder: Did I understand you to say you've met and knew Devil Anse Hatfield?

Jean Thomas: Oh, yes! I stayed in his home and with Aunt LaVicey and all when I did the story for Life. And even before that, I went up to when I, I married a young man who was wantin' to court, court me. But what I was wanting to do was, see, I jump from subject to subject. What I want wanting to do, and this young man wantin' to court me, I said, "Now, look. I want to get into show business, and I want to get out of this town and in a big hurry." And It's not nice if you go out of town that oh, they just look down on ya. They always want a standing picture or something, you know, to see if you're in trouble, to say, or gonna have a baby. But, what I wanted to do, I wanted to get out of town, and I thought well, that would be a good way. So, this young man got me ah got me a job at the Hatfield Tunnel. And I stayed with Aunt LaVicey, who was LaVicey Chafin Hatfield. I stayed in their house and did their story. I'd already written the story called "Big Sandy." That was after that (fade out)

D. J. Schroeder: Do you have any idea what year that was?

Jean Thomas: It would be about, let me see, what that would be the year I married--the last day of January, 1913. I just can't calculate, you know.

D. J. Schroeder: I think it's amazing. You're marvelous the way you calculate. Well, we've seen one picture. I, I would say there must be 200 maybe 500 framed pictures on the wall in this ēasily/fairly small room. Let me just point to one 'cause it could just be-- good heavens, I see her newest one over there, ladies. It's Charlie Chaplin and Una O'Neill who arrived in New York this year Yes for his comeback. And you've added a new thing to your collection.

Jean Thomas: Because I worked on a set with him, Dorothy Jean. You see when I worked for DeMille, and Griffith, and all the big boys, I don't have to drop names because I really worked with them and knew them before anybody

else would even venture away. Holding my clipboard here and takin', they'd tell me which camera, which angle, and all, and I would do it. And when I saw that it just elated me, because I knew that Eugene O'Neill just accused his daughter always of using his name. [Uh huh.] But, my goodness if my father, I use my father's name; he wasn't famous, but he was a brilliant man and had many, many marvelous assets, and wanted always to be an editor and writer. And with the help of God, I'll, I'll keep his name alive here in this very house.

D. J. Schroeder: What was your maiden name?

Jean Thomas: My maiden name--I was Jenny Garfield Bell according to the Bible that I have to show ya to prove to ya.

D. J. Schroeder: Where did Jean come from?

Jean Thomas: Oh, I was I always loved show business and names. I was always giving myself very, what I thought was "high-sounding names." And so once I named myself Jeannette. Yes, I called myself Jeannette. And . . . the priest who knew my family and knew my father quite well, and they read excellent literature, and philosophy, and about the stars, and what-not together. So he says, "What this this is what?" And I said, "Father, I just kind of like the name." He said, "Well, that's all right!" But, (laughs) you know, he put up with me because he was so fond of my father. They read about the stars and everything. My name was in the Bible. I'm registered Jenny Garfield Bell.

D. J. Schroeder: But your married name is Thomas.

Jean Thomas: My married name--I am Mrs. Albert Hart Thomas. My husband was the grandson of Honest John Hart, the signer of the Declaration of Independence. That was my husband, he was the grandson of him, his name was and that's why his mother named him Albert Hart Thomas.

D. J. Schroeder: Well, from where, where was he, where did he live

He was a the Thomases.

Jean Thomas: My husband? Uh huh. My husband's people, he was the only son of an only son at Lincolnshire, England, which joins Yorkshire where the Bell, my family, originated. In Yorkshire, North Lees, Ripon, Yorkshire, England, is where the Bell family is from. And, I was Jenny Bell.

D. J. Schroeder: Well, is that where you think you may have gotten your interest in this Elizabethan folk music or (fade out)

Jean Thomas: Well, I always had it from my mother who had also some French blood in her. I tell you the risings and all and in the big show business in New York, and London, and around. Yes, I got that from my mother. And she could sing, and she had heard, she had heard these songs from ah and some of the hymns that had been brought over chanted to sixth century stuff that we'd use we'd bring 'em here we'd transformed to mountain words.

D. J. Schroeder: And you're talking about 15-1800 years ago--sixth century.

Jean Thomas: Yes. Yes ma'am. Yes, my people and my family.

D. J. Schroeder: In, In what part now?

Jean Thomas: By . . . the Bell family came from North Lees, Ripon, Yorkshire, England, which adjoins Lincolnshire, England where the Thomas family, my husband, the only son of an only son in Lincolnshire lived. He came over to Princeton.

D. J. Schroeder: Why do you think that those people seem to gravitate to this area of the United States back in that time?

Jean Thomas: Well, it is similar. They like the high mountain walls and the bridgeless streams; that's primitive as they knew their England. Very similar even as to the climate. You can take, I brought ivy from over there, and it grows beautifully. People from

all over the world take a piece of ivy from London, from England, you know.

D. J. Schroeder: And it grows in Kentucky.

Jean Thomas: Yes, ma'am. It's growin' all over. Well, I couldn't tell you how many people have ivy that I've brought from England. Take it right off of the wall out there.

D. J. Schroeder: Would it be known when you would leave England or when they would leave England that they were headed for this part of the country?

Jean Thomas: Yes. That was their intent. Because, they, you see, they were intellectual people, and they wanted the high mountain walls. They wanted a similar thing to what they loved, and this was it.

D. J. Schroeder: They're a very private people.

Jean Thomas: Yes they are people, that's why people think that they are not friendly even though I ah I ah they are friendly. But nobody wants to be ah to be used say let us to use a trite word, we want to feel that people are talking to us, or coming to see us, because they like us. They want to get acquainted.

D. J. Schroeder: Rather than to be stared at or looked at.

Jean Thomas: Yes, as a curiosity. Nobody likes that. Now, I think that I certainly have proven to the world that I know, I know the Hatfields as well as anybody. When they will take you into their home and always, what I loved about 'em, always the table was set. That shows their hospitality. There was a table with food on it. And you take aside the cloth and there just plenty to eat. And their feelings are hurt if you don't eat; they're suspicious of you.

D. J. Schroeder: Well, now, you may not realize it, or we may have told you this before we began to record, but Mrs. McGinnis, one of the ladies who is with us here today Yes from the Cabell-Wayne Historical Society, her



maiden name is Hatfield. [She was telling me that.] Did she tell you that? Would you have anything, Dorothy, that you could come over. Have, have you been told any stories as a girl that the two of you might reminisce here a moment. We're going to continue. I tell you what, let's just take a breather for a moment here.

Dorothy McGinnis: I was an opry singer.

Dorothy McGinnis: You were just telling me I knew the business, Miss Thomas, but as I told you, I'm very much interested, but unfortunately, music education has very sadly lacked instruction in appreciating our heritage of these lovely songs and even training music teachers to teach their children to appreciate these things, and as I said, I might be what you might call an opry singer. Or I had aspirations to be until I met my husband, and then that just did us in just fine. Here I am, but I'm so glad because ever since I've been associated with the historical society, this thing has been, more or less, in my craw. I have had people say: "The Hatfield and McCoy feud; how terrible! You're not a part of those terrible Hatfields." And, I felt for a while like maybe I should never admit that I was a Hatfield, you know. But as time goes on, and I see how important our heritage is I am, more or less, proud to be a Hatfield, and I'm so flattered at what you just said. (Pause) The person I remember best, Miss Thomas, having reminisced about these childhood stories, is Governor Hatfield, Dr. Hatfield. You said you knew him personally. Is this right?

Jean Thomas: Oh, yes! I knew him quite well--a very, a very dignified man and very important, and I think his daughter married into one of the steel companies. Yes, but he was a little difficult. He was quick, you know, of temper and quick to speak and do this and that, but we never, we never came to blows or anything about it. He was a very nice and accommodating person . . . gave me quite a bit of time when I wanted to talk with him about "Life Visits the Hatfields and McCoys," which I did for Life

you see, the pictures there on the wall, some some years ago.

Dorothy McGinnis: Did you know anyone who was under his care when he was a doctor?

Jean Thomas: One of my relatives who was a Reardon; my sister's kin to the Reardon family. My sister, Mrs. Samuel Cecil Crawford, she's dead and gone now, and her husband was blood kin to the Crawford's and the Reardon's. Mabel, Mabel Reardon married, Mabel Crawford, our cousin, married Hugh Reardon, and Jack is the son of them.

Dorothy McGinnis: These are Huntington residents?

Jean Thomas: They are Huntington people, yes--well-known families there, that's right and I've kept up the friendship with them until they all seemed to die one by one. But, we've been friends all through the years. Anything I want, in that connection, they been always most hospitable to my thoughts and helped me along to do things.

Dorothy McGinnis: Well, you know I never really thought much about being a Hatfield, as they say. But recently, I guess I must have inherited some little tiny spark of temperament from Dr. Hatfield. I hear he was quite a temperamental person. Yes Unfortunately, I never had the pleasure. We're trying to contact Hazel, his daughter, we'd love to hear from her.

Jean Thomas: Hazel married a man in the steel industry.

Dorothy McGinnis: Benjamin Fair was his name.

Jean Thomas: Yes, Fair, I remember that. And through, see through my connection with the Huntington paper and my good friend . . . Catherine Bliss Enslow, oh, we've just worked along together for years and years, you see. Anything she'd be interested in, she'd come to me and ask me, and it just, it just seemed to happen that way always that somehow my family's either related by marriage or somehow or other to these



people. But, you see, we started here, as I tell you, my husband's, who my husband's people were and who my people were in England. And it just seems the right thing. I believe in Destiny, and I believe in the pattern. Definitely, I believe in the pattern. And that if we'll follow it and not try to be too uppity ourselves and think we know it all but if we follow definitely the pattern, it'll generally turn out right. I've had proof of it again and again.

Dorothy McGinnis: Now, I hate to repeat something that I said just a while ago, but I was talking to a good friend last night, and she feels a need such as we all here do of trying to acquaint, especially the little children, of with the fine attributes of a good heritage and make it possible that everything doesn't go away. And, I think this, you have certainly contributed a great part in in making this possible or this program available to people of all walks of lives and all ages of people. They can participate, they can watch, they can feel like they're a part of this part of the country, and they can be proud of their heritage. We are striving very hard back in Huntington to do this sort of thing by restoring some things or not restoring but trying to rescue some of the things of the past before they are taken down. How do you feel that we can possibly restore our heritage if we don't have, as you do, this talent for getting all these people together such as you do.

Jean Thomas: I would simply begin with the children and interest them. Interest them. A child is the best critic in the world because they are they are so truthful and so honest and they begin to fidget and won't listen. Make it interesting to them--dramatize it, dramatize it. The least little thing you tell, if there's any drama in it, and there's surely plenty of drama around here. Why, make it live. Now for instance, this would be an illustration from my viewpoint. Once . . . my mother was just a born actress, you know, just born. It was in her blood. /Right/ She liked that. And so once I came home and I said, "A boy, boy" I said, "That mean one, Mumsy."

I says, "That mean one." I said, "He took my pen wiper and destroyed it." Huh! She wouldn't listen to me, and I said then, I saw I wasn't on the right track, I must make it interesting to my mother and then I'd know I interest a child. So I told her, I said, "Yes, and he took my pen wiper that you made out of out of father's little old felt hat and threw it in the ink well and threw it down at me." And I said, "I didn't like that, and I just told him so." And I said right then and there, "I don't think you're a bit nice. I think you're a mean. You're just as mean as you can be." And then suddenly I saw my mother's eyes light. Now, I was doin' it right then. And once in a while, though, she could speak German; it was awkward to her, and she didn't like it. This was just an instance along with telling you about the little pen wiper that I can show you. So she said, her eyes kind of glazed, and she said, "Es donnert," and I said, "Ja, es es donnert." Ooooooh! Way off there, you know, and that suited her. I had to dramatize everything. Don't just say, "I think it is thundering . . ."

Dorothy McGinnis: But, I'll bet that was the end of the whole incident. She didn't think the little boy had a psychological hang-up or that you needed special attention because you had been bothered. This is what bothers me so much nowadays. We don't really appreciate these little things that happen, and we don't look back on them as funny little stories anymore. We always say, "Well, that child needs help or attention."

Jean Thomas: And you use big words.

Dorothy McGinnis: We use big words they don't understand, and this is enough to give a child a hang-up. At least, I feel like it might.

Jean Thomas: Well, I would think a child if I would go to usin' those great big words . . . I'd annoy me, myself. Why, I'd get tired of hearing myself. I never want to do that. And I like to make plays of everything and do this and that. And I hear a bird sing, and just think, and there's God's stars up there. And

He lets us, He knows how to place them, and they don't ever jangle together. And He gives us that free, we don't have to pay a penny. (Pause) A child, I think, with a child today, it's unfortunate; they exaggerate, I would say, the thought of money. I think it should be kept from a child, let them see how many beautiful things there are that God gives us. Sunlight, you know, makes us warm, makes your flowers grow, makes you want to sing and act.

Dorothy McGinnis: You know, I wish that we West Virginia folks could claim you as our very own. But, I suppose Kentucky already has possession of you. And, I'd like to ask you if you might help us recall some memories of one of our West Virginia ladies that was so very much interested and a very dear friend of yours, I believe you said. This is Aunt Mary Vincent Clark.

Jean Thomas: Oh, yes. Mary Vincent Clark--one of the dearest friends ever I had in the world. And, I have her book. I, I, I pride myself, I believe, on having the most unique library concerning our heritage and our song and our ways. The most unique, because I have had the honor and the privilege of knowing the great people that helped to make it. Directors like directors, and people themselves, like would say Mary Vincent Clark, she just lived the life and was so proud of the things that were given them as I say the heritage that we have and made us all feel proud. And another one was Miss Jesse Baker of Kermit. A marvelous woman, a columnist and everything else, and she just cries the praises of it. And, I go often to her place because we just understand each other so well.

Dorothy McGinnis: Then she's a West Virginian, too.

Jean Thomas: Yes. She is from Kermit, West Virginia--Jesse Baker, a teacher and all. One of the most wonderful people I've ever met.

Dorothy McGinnis: Did you ever do any fortune telling or card playing with Miss Clark?

Jean Thomas:

Well, she might for me, but you see that's against my religion. I never did have much faith in that. I want somethin' more real. I don't mind havin' them look in the crystal ball. Yes, I, they can do that for me because I got some good results there with a woman who was forever lookin' in the crystal ball, and they have some kind of religion. They were Swedish, and they believed in somethin'. I said, "That sounds pretty good to me." I don't know what it is, but I'll go for that because I can really draw some meaning from it. Stand in front of St. Xavier's Church in New York, and a woman came up to me, and she says, "Verdum." She says, she was trying to tell me, says, "Too much b-b," and patted her stomach, and I said, "Oh, you want the open door." And, I took her over, I took over across the street to what is her name. The woman with the child . . . the child woman, you know that you . . . Sanger, and her husband was an artist. And so you can just meet people like that and even tho' you hardly know what I hardly knew what she was talkin' about, I said, "Oh, you mean the open door," and dragged her over there. And as you go in, all those papers are just a flutterin', press clippings and everything about Margaret Sanger. What a woman. What a woman. And that's the way . . . the least little thing now she took and dramatized, don't you see, all these press notices and things, complaints about her. She used them in a very dramatic way and if you dramatize the simplest thing, it'll help you a whole lot. Especially with a child. Never fool yourself about the child. Oh, they're the best critics in the world.

Dorothy McGinnis: Sometimes the truth is more appealing than fiction then to people when you . . .

Jean Thomas:

Yes, than you think. If you can give it a give it ah little push and punch you know. Now just to say it up in just precise and what ah a school marm's word is the only thing that I would know to use, want to make it too precise and all. Make it more colorful because a child is as responsive.

Dorothy McGinnis: Well, can you recite any of these lovely Elizabethan dialects in any form of poetry? You were mentioning "The Lovely Day of April" we had to look forward to when the dogwood's blooming.

Jean Thomas: Well, I, I, I do know a lot of them. I've got books around here by the stack. The one that, the one that's over there called The Sun Shines Bright, and The Big Sandy Book, The Big Sandy Book, and that that little poem that she's reaching for now. They're born poets, and I let them do the poetry, and I do the presenting you see. "The Wee House in the Woods," this boy, this boy, this this boy, Harrison Elliot is a good boy. He wrote this, and I took him on the network with that. They liked it so well, and we went far, that boy did but he's a little difficult to handle. I don't profess to . . .

Dorothy McGinnis: Would you be kind enough to read it for us. I'm sure you can do a fine job.

Jean Thomas: Let me see. "There it stood, the wee house in the wood outlined against an azure sky, and by its side, near, yet far away, the graying hills of the last of day towered into God's heaven. Standing, gazing there, the cares of the present left me, and presently I walked beside old errants, rippling waves, the leaves rustled as I talked as I talked to my friend of Shakespeare's rise to fame in meteorlike. And I saw a serenader (this young poet is telling this to me). I saw a serenader strum the dulcimer beneath a suckle-covered balcony and mellow-green a dancin' to the fiddler's merry strain." You see how poetic they are? And, I would take each of these things and use 'em and read 'em, and we would go through with it right on the right on the tape or whatever we're doing.

Dorothy McGinnis: This is words then . . .

Jean Thomas: Yes, he would, he would recite it and say to me, and I would say, "Oh, that sounds beautiful to me." That's, I am not a poet; I write, I write poetic prose is what critics call it. And, ah have I answered your question?

- Dorothy McGinnis: Yes, I think this poem also points out that another fact that we should be so proud of our heritage here certainly nothing is more to be remembered than Shakespeare's lovely works and the Avon. Is that the river in England? [/The Avon River in England he is writing about/ And the Elizabethan Ballads that these people have brought with them. I think we should be proud to be part of all this and try to instill in our children that their past is is so much a part of them and if everything goes--how was you said it, D. J.? If we don't have a past to look to--something about the future. I'm sorry I caught you unaware there.
- D. J. Schroeder: Well, as we were driving here, I said, in 1972, the world is pretty much in turmoil. Do you watch TV very much, read the newspapers much?
- Jean Thomas: Well, I don't have time because my TV is upstairs and I . . .
- D. J. Schroeder: Well, are you aware of the Viet Nam War and how long . . .
- Jean Thomas: I know things, and I think it's so cruel. What I think about war is because, you see, my three generations have lived and died for America. And what I think is so unreal, so unnecessary maybe, I'm not a big enough thinker. But the Lord permitted us, our forebearers, to come here to this beautiful country because they wanted to worship God and love the things about 'em that God gave us. Now, why do we go out and cause ourself trouble and confusion in other places. We can't do any good. We can only make trouble for ourselves and our loved ones.
- D. J. Schroeder: That's what I said. The world this year, 1972, this spring, is in such a mess and turmoil that really all we have to look forward to is the future or to think back about our heritage--the past. We, the present is so, so bad, it seems at the present time. But, I think you're sort of insulated from it here, and you're still living almost, I believe, in your heritage life, aren't you?



- Jean Thomas: Well, I like to feel that that is what I'm doing. I don't want to be called a person not up to date. I know pretty well what's goin' on, but it is such a beautiful heritage that we have that I'd hate to see it die, and I would do most anything within, within my human power to keep it alive like you see it and hear it here. Nothing, nothing grander.
- D. J. Schroeder: When you were speaking with Dorothy Hatfield McGinnis a moment ago, two things came up, and you said something about Margaret Sanger. I'd like to know what you thought of her then, 'cause she was controversial, I know her very well. and what you think of the birth control pill now.
- Jean Thomas: I like Margaret Sanger very well and met her through a lady that I had met through my mountain connections out here in Rowan County. She knew about me when I came there. She says, "I want you to meet Margaret Sanger and all." And I had been throwed at many times with Margaret Sanger and crowds around that want to hurt her, they don't believe in that; that is wrong and called her . . .
- D. J. Schroeder: What did they call her?
- Jean Thomas: Well, they said that she was a trouble maker, a trouble maker, and that her father they, they said that her father was an infidel, and that the thought that she was leading into wrong doing. Now, I think Margaret Sanger meant well. She thought that make a child welcome, and give it something to look forward to and something to be proud of to retain. To live it again. That isn't being old fashioned. That's loving what you came from, the good things that you've inherited that God has given ya.
- D. J. Schroeder: Then you weren't shocked at her at that time? You liked her?
- Jean Thomas: I liked her very much! And very much indeed and traveled with her and brought her to Huntington.
- D. J. Schroeder: You were mod then, and you're mod now. And, let's

see. [/Laughing] That's the word they say. Well, I think even that's dated. You said something about that isn't my religion. What is your religion?

Jean Thomas: I am Roman Catholic by birth. I was born Roman Catholic.

D. J. Schroeder: Do you practice it?

Jean Thomas: Well, I could never hope to be the devout and the long suffering, and the faithful Catholic that my mother was, but I certainly never would turn to any other faith. And whatever I can do for my mother's parish to which she has given so much and my people have given so much of their brain and the things they love and the things are American that I would never forsake it.

D. J. Schroeder: I'm going to give you a moment to drink a glass of water or think for a moment, then we'll come back and talk about when you first started your folk festival, how many years it has been going on, and what you feel about it today. (Pause)

D. J. Schroeder: Just start.

Jean Thomas: (Singing) "He's got little bitsy babies in His hands. He's got little bitsy babies in His hands, little bitsy babies in his hands. He's got the whole world in His hands." (Pause) Always, we at the close of our festival every year, we always sing that best loved lonesome tune of the mountains called Down in the Valley, the Valley so Low, Hang your Head Over, Hear the Winds Blow. It goes like this, and one of the little ones, the least one, leads us in that. A little child shall lead them. (Singing) "Down in the valley, the valley so low, hang your head over, hear the winds blow. Hear the winds blow, dear, hear the winds blow. Hang your head over, hear the winds blow."

D. J. Schroeder: Now, we're going to ask the "traipsin woman," Miss Jean Thomas, if she'll tell us the first time she remembers getting involved in or producing the



folk festival, and then also the first time she put it on here at the "wee house in the wood," how she happened to come to Ashland, Kentucky, and move in this charming spot.

Jean Thomas:

How I happened to come to this house [Uh huh.] is that it is and an exact reproduction of the home in England of the Bell family. I was Jenny Garfield Bell before I became Mrs. Albert Hart Thomas. And I so liked it all, and it was so beautiful, all handmade brick, and I so loved England because I had heard my father talk about it, my people, and about our people in England so I decided to bring it here to this spot which my, my brother had bought and what was hard times and that that and the other. He . . . was about to lose it, so he phoned me in New York. You see, I worked all together 13 years in New York in show business because my people were in show business there and from there to London 'round. So, he phoned me, says, "Come down Sis and see what you think of it;" says, "You ought to take this place on, let's not lose it." And that was my brother, Dr. William George Bell, who was also a, an inventor and thus and so. So, I came, and I was so carried away with it. I said, "Well, if it takes the last," I forget, "two dimes to rub together, I've got the brick all cleaned and, and bring 'em and we'll put 'em on this site which Uncle John loved so well." He was a furnace master, and my parents were married out here. I can take you in 20 minutes to the spot where they were married, Buena Vista Furnace. And so I wanted . . . it just caught me. I wanted that so badly, and I determined to have it; and I think it was just about the right way and hold the right picture in your mind. And, I do believe, I do believe so definitely in the pattern. If we'll just listen and follow the hand of the Lord to lead us in the right way.

D. J. Schroeder:

And did you immediately put on a folk festival the following June?

Jean Thomas:

Yes . . . then I had, I knew about a singin' gatherin' which was centuries old, and always they held it on

the second Sunday in June, so I thought to myself, I'll just use a little drama and make it let so the world will understand it. My advisors say let's call it so the world will know what it 'tis American Folk Song Festival, which I did but I always say and even my textbook, my textbook which I wrote for Silver Burdett, I call it the Singin' Gatherin', because that's really what it is.

D. J. Schroeder: And all of the mountain people came from the hills.

Jean Thomas: Oh, they came, the people joyfully came. They just loved that, and that I would carry it on in the same way. And, I had an agreement with them, said we'll never make mock and we'll never sell it for gold is the way they put it. I said, "We will never sell it for gold as long as I live." And when I hand it down that's the agreement that we're not doin' this for money and commercialize it and destroy it before we get started. That's what destroys half of the good movements, they become so aware of the dollar. Children, children talk in money and this, that, and the other. I think it's the most pathetic thing in the world.

D. J. Schroeder: Do you mean you would not let television come and film this and put it on for the nation to see?

Jean Thomas: Oh, I, it has been filmed, and I've been on every network you could think of. But, I always have it understood that whatever that they might gain by it goes for the perpetuation of the thing that I want to see perpetuated, our heritage, our song, and our love of God, and country, and the beautiful things that God gave us. Not to commercialize it.

D. J. Schroeder: Who is going to inherit this and continue as you have been doing?

Jean Thomas: The pretty girl that you see her picture in here in the other room that I maybe showed you a while ago. She and my nephew, he's an Ensign, and they're both employed, they are employed together at Armco. They like their work, and they just, it just seems to be

and I like her very much. Not only is she beautiful, but she is gifted and understanding. And that is what I must have, that they just not, oh, to get up there and have their picture made. That won't do. I could get a hundred from any place. But I want somebody that really feels it, and loves it, and that girl does. I can tell it.

D. J. Schroeder: How many people come in June to sing in the Singin' Gatherin'?

Jean Thomas: Well, it depends, because as I say, I'm a gambler on the gate, and the weather, and good luck, and sometimes if it's bright, why, we've had, I believe one time, 7,000 came through that gate, and they like to sit on the ground there.

D. J. Schroeder: Do they bring food? Is there any food?

Jean Thomas: We've looked to that, and I tell 'em now fetch themselves some hot food. And some man got onto it and put a place in or something out by the gate where they could buy refreshments and all. But, we, I called my man quickly, I says, "Come and bring your car and some sandwiches and get so closed to gate we'll drive the other fellow out of business." So we got rid of that. You have to look to every little angle because we must do something to perpetuate it. You don't pick the money off the trees; at least I never have.

D. J. Schroeder: As I remember, it's just a silver offering anyway, isn't it?

Jean Thomas: Oh yes. Oh yes. We don't attempt to charge a great big price because that isn't the way things are perpetuated. It's because of love, and the people who are and do understand, and want to perpetuate the things that God has given us, the beautiful things in the heritage. It's done in that way.

D. J. Schroeder: All right, now we're going to close, and I'm going to give you the opportunity to say to maybe someone who'd be listening to this a hundred years from now

maybe 50 years from now. It's even possible 300 years from now. And these will really be old times to them. Can you imagine, they'll be going to the moon and to Mars, and they won't be impressed with it at all. But, they'll still be studying just as we do the times of 2,000 years ago. Say something to those people who may be listening to this. Hundreds, decades of time from now. What do you have to say to them?

Jean Thomas:

Oh, I say God bless you and guide your steps. A little child shall lead them. And what's in your heart, what's in your heart will come out through your lips and God will bless you which the right thing to perpetuate the beautiful things all the beautiful things He's given us is free as the sunlight and the murmur of the brook, and the song of the birds, and all that. And, we pray for that and hold, hold to that. It will so happen.

D. J. Schroeder:

You've heard Miss Jean Thomas, Mrs. Jean Thomas, the "traipsin woman" in her 91st year give advice to those of you who may be listening hundreds maybe, maybe even more than that years from the year 1972. Thank you for allowing us to come into your home today, Mrs. Thomas, and we wish you much success on your forthcoming trip to Scotland and England.